

Impact

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Avatier's Self-Service Account Provisioning: Big Gains, No Pains

Looking for a real McCoy when it comes to identity management and user account provisioning? Recent Aberdeen research finds that customers say that Avatier and its self-service account provisioning software deliver big benefits.

Life-Cycle User Provisioning

Technology suppliers certainly use some unusual terms to describe processes. For example, the term “life-cycle user provisioning” has become synonymous with all the procedures employed by an organization to:

- Establish new user account profiles that enable new employees to access applications, data, and computing resources
- Retire orphaned user account profiles of former employees to prevent unauthorized access of applications, data, and computing resources
- Maintain existing account profiles to ensure appropriate access to applications, data, and computing resources

Not limited to employees, life-cycle provisioning is also conducted for non-employees — suppliers, partners, and customers — to enable these constituents to appropriately access information technology (IT) resources, including electronic applications, data, networks, and computing systems.

Provisioning and User Account Profiles

User account profiles fundamentally are about access: to applications, data, transactions, and computing resources. As such, provisioning of user account profiles involves the manipulation of access roles and rules for individual users, which in most commercial firms are based on job function. Provisioning of user account profiles involves a combination of people, procedures, and security products to effectively implement an organization's access policies.

One Sigma User Account Provisioning

In simple terms, one sigma user provisioning means that two-thirds of a given user population will be using one primary log-on environment, with the other third of the population using a variety of systems to access corporate IT resources.

When the concept is applied to user accounts, most IT managers find that employees are provided with access to IT resources after first logging on to local Microsoft-based LAN servers. And, depending on the organization, the

actual metric of initial employee access to computing resources can be as high as two, three, and more sigma. For some organizations, this may mean most — if not all — employees log in to electronic computing resources, initially, via a Microsoft LAN server.

As a result, most employee-based user account profiles that need to be configured, maintained, and retired are those found on Microsoft-based LAN servers. Thus, it makes sense for IT managers to be looking for life-cycle provisioning software that will deal with the largest problem of all: the ongoing provisioning of employee user accounts on Microsoft servers.

Employee Provisioning's Big Gains

The biggest problems for IT organizations — when it comes to providing employees with appropriate access to computing resources — is the triad of life-cycle provisioning, namely the:

- Initial configuration of user accounts
- Ongoing maintenance of user accounts
- Retirement of invalid and orphaned user accounts

Life-cycle provisioning software that automates the processes of initially configuring user accounts, providing for ongoing maintenance, and automatically retiring orphaned accounts can deliver greater control at the local level. This software results in increased productivity for users, significant cost reductions in IT operations, and much lower compliance failures.

Configuring New Employee Accounts

Aberdeen research shows that, on average, it takes about 20 minutes to fully configure and deploy each new Microsoft-based employee user account. Software that can automate the configuration of new accounts can reduce this configuration time to seconds, not minutes.

Maintaining Existing User Accounts

Aberdeen research also shows two major maintenance activities for life-cycle provisioning: (1) changes in job functions and computing resources and (2) password maintenance. Both of these activities are ongoing sources of expense for maintaining user accounts. When not automated, the average time to update user accounts is about five minutes per account, whereas unlocking passwords and frozen accounts and resetting these accounts take about 20 minutes per account.

Users, line managers, and IT managers alike see software that empowers users to unlock their own accounts and reset their own passwords as a win-win situation. This software not only enables users to overcome problems with no intervention, but also reduces the cost to maintain user accounts to almost zero while markedly improving productivity.

Retiring Orphaned User Accounts

The compliance problem with orphaned user accounts is real, tangible, and decidedly unknown, according to most IT managers interviewed by Aberdeen. One of the largest problems for IT organizations is finding and then

eliminating dead user accounts from long-retired employees, users who are no longer employed at a company, and accounts that were established for overhauled business and organizational procedures.

Unfortunately, finding and eliminating these accounts is rarely accomplished, resulting in compliance audit failures year after year. Software that can automate the discovery and elimination of orphaned user accounts results in passed audits, significantly reduced exposures and vulnerabilities, and reduced electronic loss rates.

Avatier's Software

Avatier's customers use its software products to automate the life-cycle provisioning of employee user accounts. The firm's software products include:

- Password Station.NET
- Trusted Enterprise Manager
- Password Bouncer

A key benefit of Avatier's products is its ability to deliver self-service to employees and IT managers for the entire life cycle of user account management: for configuration, maintenance, and the retirement of orphaned user accounts.

Password Station.NET

Password Station.NET enables users to unlock frozen accounts and reset their own passwords. Normally encountered because of aging password procedures on Microsoft LAN servers, the Password Station.NET product enables (1) users to avoid unnecessary disruptions, (2) IT

to eliminate the inevitable 2 a.m. tech-support phone calls, and (3) the organization to avoid unproductive and costly procedures while maintaining compliance with security policies.

Trusted Enterprise Manager

Avatier's Trusted Enterprise Manager delivers several capabilities to IT managers, including (1) the flexibility to define and implement delegated IT administration for configuring, maintaining, and retiring user accounts; (2) the ability to react locally to real problems caused by user account glitches; and (3) the essential reporting required for passing compliance audits with flying colors.

For example, if account maintenance needs to be performed within a local business unit, a local office, or at a business division level, Trusted Enterprise Manager enables the organization to automate an appropriate level of local control. The result: organizations can take full advantage of IT to meet local market conditions, while ensuring corporate control over electronic access to IT resources.

Password Bouncer

The most common form of electronic user credential is the ubiquitous password. Most often, users remember one password for all of their accounts, including bank accounts, trading accounts, cell phone accounts, Internet access accounts, and their local LAN account at work. Password Bouncer enables an organization to enforce its password policies and reduce exposures

resulting from commonly used passwords, while improving protection against password hackers and crackers.

Avatier Customers: Big Gains, No Pains

IT managers recently interviewed by Aberdeen say that Avatier's products pay for themselves within a month or two. Voted "vendor of the year" by some, Avatier is commonly cited by its customers for delivering excellent customer service and superb technical support. Avatier's customers say that its software is installed and operating in less than a half-hour, with many IT buyers quoting times of 5 to 10 minutes.

Avatier's customers also noted benefits that include (1) reduced technology and procedural complexity and (2) avoidance of problems that are often caused by who controls local user accounts.

Aberdeen research finds that most of Avatier's IT customers are configuring and maintaining user accounts based on the unique organizational practices of their enterprises. Whether the organization relies on centrally controlled user accounts, geographically dispersed user accounts, or user accounts controlled by human resources and business units, each customer is using Avatier's software to meet unique operating requirements.

Lastly, Avatier's IT customers consistently cite a common theme of increased local business unit productivity without losing the ability to maintain corporate-wide security controls.

Aberdeen Conclusions

Automating employee account provisioning, including replacing lost and forgotten passwords, pays big financial dividends. It currently costs more than \$160 per user, per year to simply configure and maintain each user account the old-fashioned way — by hand — with costs adding up quickly, especially for larger enterprises.

By automating these functions, corporations are dramatically reducing costs, providing users with greater flexibility, and making it possible for the enterprise to adapt to organizational change, including the integration of newly acquired businesses.

Automating the provisioning of the enterprises' employee account profiles, most often on Microsoft LAN-based servers, is an opportunity ripe with dividends. The benefits of user password reset and account management cannot be overstated: users love this capability, business line managers demand it, financial officers approve it, IT managers reduce operating expenses, and compliance officers extol it.

IT buyers unfamiliar with Avatier should examine this supplier and its software and then check its references. They will be glad that they did.

— *Jim Hurley*

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